

Butler Eagle

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31 die in helicopter crash

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

BAGHDAD, Iraq — A U.S. Marine helicopter transporting troops crashed today in the desert of western Iraq, killing 31 Marines, American military officials said. It was the deadliest crash of a U.S. military helicopter in Iraq.

A Pentagon source said the helicopter was a CH-53 Sea Stallion, which is normally configured to carry 37 passengers, but can take up to 55.

A Bush administration official said there were no survivors

Transport goes down during Iraq mission

from the crash and that the cause was not immediately known.

A search and rescue team has reached the site and an investigation into what caused the crash was under way. The administration official said there was bad weather at the time.

President Bush planned a statement.

"We are saddened anytime there is loss of life of our troops in harm's way," White House press secretary Scott McClellan said.

The death toll was the largest for a U.S. aircraft crash in Iraq since U.S. forces invaded in

March 2003.

The helicopter went down about 1:20 a.m. near the town of Rutbah, about 220 miles west of Baghdad, while conducting security operations, the military said in a statement. The aircraft was transporting personnel from the 1st Marine Division.

Previously, the deadliest inci-

dent involving U.S. troops was a Nov. 15, 2003, crash of two Black Hawk helicopters that collided while trying to avoid ground fire in Mosul, killing 17 U.S. soldiers and wounding five.

Earlier that month, a Chinook transport helicopter was shot down by a shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missile near Fallujah,

killing 16 American soldiers and wounding 26.

The military has lost at least 33 helicopters since the start of the war, including at least 20 brought down by hostile fire, according to a study by the Brookings Institution.

The deadliest day for American troops during the initial invasion of Iraq was March 23, 2003, when 26 Americans were killed in a number of separate incidents. President Bush

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Cheerful effort



DAVE PRELOSKY/BUTLER EAGLE

Butler Golden Tornado cheerleaders try to get the crowd back into the boys basketball game against Shaler on Tuesday at Shaler High School. Shaler won, 67-48, their ninth win in a row. The Titans haven't lost since the last time the two teams met on Dec. 23. In that game, Butler's big

men, Nate Hartung and Jade Burka controlled the game. But on Tuesday, both fouled out early. The loss virtually eliminated the Tornado from playoff contention — leaving them three games out of the final playoff spot with only three games remaining. Story on Page 19.

2 to face charges in thefts

Teenagers broke into post office, high school

By DALE W. HLAVES
Eagle Staff Writer

PARKER, Armstrong County — State police in Clarion County are preparing to file charges against at least two juveniles in connection with a series of burglaries in the area during the past few months.

Criminal investigator Trooper Al Carmichael of the state police in Clarion said officials will file charges ranging from burglary to destruction of government property no sooner than the end of this week.

Strong evidence led two suspects to admit to burglarizing several businesses and residences in the Parker area, including the Allegheny-Clarion Valley High School twice and the Parker Post Office during the weekend.

Carmichael said the high school was burglarized on Nov. 14. Video surveillance cameras caught the pair breaking into the school through a back window and leaving the same way, but there is no footage of them inside the school.

After the school was burglarized again on Jan. 20, state police looked at a list of 10 possible juvenile suspects and two of the names were familiar.

Since the juveniles had moved, the two officers went to Parker Postmaster Leo Marron to get

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Man charged in debit card plot

Police: Merchant stole patrons' info

By JIM SMITH
Eagle Staff Writer

JACKSON TWP — A beer distributor is accused of using a skimming device to steal customers' debit card information that fueled a two-week shopping spree at numerous stores.

Todd Alan Cooper, owner of Zelig Beer 4 Less on Route 19, allegedly bought a snowblower, electric train sets, maternity clothes, food and other items with bogus debit cards he cloned from genuine cards, police said.

Cooper, 38, of 164 Zehner School Road is expected to turn himself in to authorities today.

Police on Tuesday obtained an arrest warrant for Cooper, who is charged with four counts each of theft, receiving stolen property, access device fraud, possessing instruments of crime, and unlawful device-making

equipment.

The charges followed a four-week investigation by police that linked Cooper to the skimming scam in which he is accused of making about \$8,000 in fraudulent purchases between Nov. 22 and Dec. 5.

Skimming is a kind of high-tech crime that entails scanning credit, debit or ATM cards — usually at retail stores — to "skim" off the financial data encoded on the card's magnetic strip.

Police said Cooper allegedly swiped the debit cards of four customers, once into his store's device as part of the transaction and — unbeknown to the customers — a second time into a separate device.

Jackson Township police Chief Len Keller said Cooper bought the scanning device and related computer software on the Internet.

The skimmed numbers stored

■ See Plot on Page 5

DEATHS

Janice Gardner Cook, services
Anna Ellwood, Mars
Anne C. Matula, formerly of Weir Avenue
Judith L. Teets Pavano, New Sewickley Township, Beaver County
Ethel M. Payne, formerly of Mars
Ann E. Shields, formerly of Zelenople
Eloise Devitt Snyder, formerly of Shaler Township
John Stephain, formerly of Lyndora
Richard E. Truby, services
Clarence J. Weitman, 200 N. Washington St.
Eleanor M. Brunner Wuerger, West Deer Township

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Informant gives testimony at trial

He says inmate discussed plots to kill troopers

By KIM PASKORZ
Eagle Staff Writer

The trial for an inmate at the Butler County Prison accused of plotting to murder two state troopers began Tuesday with testimony from the man's former cellmate.

The former inmate-turned-confidential police informant told the jury at first he thought Richard Swartzlander III was "venting" when he talked about shooting his uncle, Sgt. Theodore Swartzlander, and Trooper David Aldridge.

"But then I realized, this guy is serious," the informant testified.

The informant claims Richard Swartzlander, 21, who was angry and bitter about past legal problems, attempted to include him in his murderous plot last spring to "take out" the troopers. He asked the informant to get a gun and write out a "to do" list to put the plan in motion.

"Donate clothes after homicide," begins

the list, which was given to the jury. It ends, "1 shot, 1 kill, aim high to miss vest."

Richard Swartzlander, who lives in Center Township, was incarcerated on allegations of having sex with a 14-year-old girl and threatening her mother.

Prosecutors contend Richard Swartzlander targeted Aldridge because he had arrested him. And, prosecutors assert Richard Swartzlander hated his uncle because both had been parties in a lawsuit over guns owned by the defendant's deceased father.

But defense attorney Alexander Lindsay told the jury if there was a plan to kill the troopers, it was not hatched by his client. Rather it was the product of the confidential informant's fear of the state penitentiary.

Lindsay said the informant, who has a history of problems with drugs and depression, knew he could lessen his legal woes by telling police about other people's crimes.

The informant said he had twice before worked with the police in similar fashions.

The informant was facing stolen prop-

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